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ABSTRACT

Follow-up telephone interviews with 165 recent graduates of the University of Texas at Austin were used as the final stage of a research project on Personality, Teacher Education and Teaching Behavior (PTETB). A standard procedure was followed with all subjects, and permission to tape-record the interviews was granted in all but one instance. The interviews were constructed with open-end inquiries, beginning with broad questions and progressively narrowing to specifics; one interview schedule was designed for teachers and one for non-teachers. The analysis of the data obtained has not yet been completed, but results so far obtained indicate that 61 percent of the subjects had taught and planned to continue, 8 percent had left the profession, and 31 percent had indefinite plans, including a significantly higher proportion of secondary than elementary education majors. The goals of the PTETB project were to increase the number of promising candidates who continued teaching and to increase the number of unsuitable candidates who left. The interviews indicated that there seemed to be a general tendency for those rated higher as student teachers to be more committed to a teaching career; the tendency of the highest rated teachers to teach and the lowest rated teachers to quit was slightly increased after feedback given during the project on their student teaching performance, but this was not significant. (MBM)

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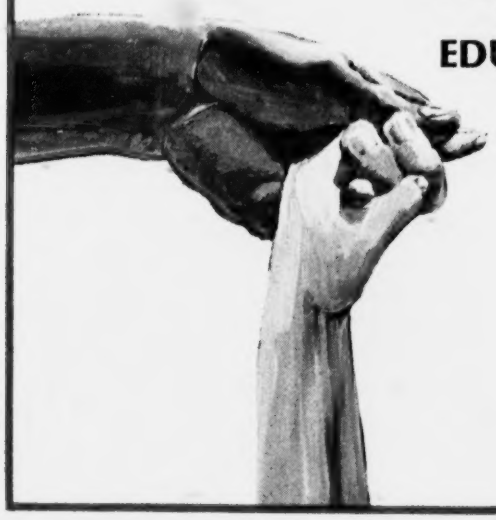

THE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

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Beulah Newlove

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The Research and Development Center for Teacher Education
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THE TELEPHONE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW: A LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH TOOL IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Beulah Newlove[1]

One hundred and seventy-six recent graduates of The University of Texas at Austin participated in various phases of an educational research project known as the Personality, Teacher Education, and Teaching Behavior Project (PTETB). Sponsored by grants from the U.S. Office of Education and administered most recently through the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at The University of Texas at Austin, the project tested the effects of a personalized program of teacher educatior on the attitudes and teaching behavior of prospective teachers in undergraduate preparation in The University of Texas College of Education.

The personalized treatments used were (1) individual counseling based on psychological assessment from written instruments, (2) film behavior in which each teacher saw, with a counselor, a sound film of herself teaching, and (3) situation feedback in which the subjects were either placed in student teaching situations tailored to their needs or given feedback about their student teaching situation (Fuller, et al., 1969). Data were gathered at all phases of the experiment to evaluate the effects of the treatments as they were applied and withheld in various combinations with the several groups of subjects.

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[1]The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of Meda White, Frances Fuller, and Diane Alexander.

The data were not complete, however, until follow-up interviews traced the graduates at least a short way into their careers beyond the college classroom.

The Follow-Up Interview

The fact that subjects were located in 18 states and the District of Columbia precluded face-to-face interviews. Mail questionnaires were not attempted because of the unfavorable percentage of returned forms, the probability of incomplete responses, the possibility of misinterpretation of questions, and, particularly, superficiality of response and lack of personal feeling inherent in the method. This lack was particularly important since the feelings of the subject were to be assessed. Other undesirable features of mailed questionnaires have been noted by Frazen and Lazersfeld (1945), Hancock (1940), and Kerlinger (1964). Jackson and Rothney (1961) found, in comparison with mailed questionnaires, that interviews resulted in "greater insight into the responders and got more complete responses." These features of interviews were seen as important for this follow-up study since the attitudes, opinions and feelings of the subjects were sought, as well as statistical information.

A second alternative was telephone interviews. Baumgarten (1931) suggests some of the effects of using the telephone for interviewing. Inhibitions frequently are lessened, resulting in the expression of more negative opinions than would be stated in a face-to-face situation. This feature promised a more honest appraisal of the experimental teacher education program.

Tape recording the telephone conversations is not difficult, and more complete and accurate information is obtained. Even if interviews are not taped, interviewers can more easily take notes without interfering with the spontaneity of the teacher. While visual cues are absent in telephone interviewing, there are other clues to feelings which may be conveyed by inflection and tone of voice.

Interview Procedures

So that similar procedures might be used for all subjects, the telephone was employed for interviews of all 165 subjects, regardless of distance. The follow-up study was begun in the spring of 1967, the last year of the PTETB project. Of the 176 subjects involved in that study, 165 have been reached by telephone.

First contact with these former students was by a letter that thanked them for their contributions to education and for their cooperation in the research program. It restated the researcher's interest in them after leaving the University and requested that they complete a brief form asking for address and occupation, as well as any name changes. A second letter was sent asking ex-students' telephone numbers for the follow-up interviews.

Finding so many young women after they had left the University was less difficult than had been anticipated. University personnel, housemothers, roommates, and long-distance telephone operators joined in the search for those few with whom contact had been lost. Of the original 176 subjects, 11 were not interviewed for the following reasons: one had died, five were in foreign countries (brief information on these was obtained from their parents), four had previously requested to have no further contact with the program, and one refused, when phoned, to have further contact. This is most unusual, perhaps unique -- 100 percent of a subject sample accounted for!

A standard procedure was followed with all subjects. During a preliminary phone call, the interviewer set up an appointment for a future telephone interview. Appointments were made one to six days in advance, usually for the evening hours when long-distance rates were lower and subjects more likely to be free. At the beginning of each scheduled interview, permission was secured to tape record. Permission was refused only once. The interviewer embedded the questions in a friendly but professionally oriented conversation, putting into operation one of two flexible interview schedules.

Interviewer Orientation

Three female interviewers, each with a background in educational psychology and/or counseling and guidance, were trained for the task in conferences with an experienced interviewer through role-playing and listening to tapes of previous telephone interviews. Benney, Riesman, and Star (1956) demonstrated that in a "sensitive area of communication" female interviewers obtained better responses from women. Since in this study all interviewers and subjects were female, the responsiveness which was elicited from subjects was not unexpected.

Interview Schedules

The two interview schedules were constructed with open-end inquiries, beginning with broad questions and progressively narrowing to specifics. One interview schedule was designed for "Teachers," the other for "Non-Teachers." The proper schedule was chosen according to the subject's response to the first question:

"Could you begin by telling me the kind of things you have done since leaving the University?" This introductory question and the flexible procedure probably accounted for the large amount of information and feeling volunteered by responders. Specific questions could be posed later. The interviewers thus encouraged spontaneity and almost invariably secured the desired information. The success experienced is not surprising in light of Deschin's (1963) finding that interviewing skill is more important to the success of an interview than the structure of the schedule followed.

The initial sequence of questions was as follows:

> Could you begin by telling me the kinds of things you have done since leaving the University?
>
> Can you give me a little more detail about your first year of teaching, about your school and class?
>
> What turned out to be different from what you expected when you began teaching?
>
> In retrospect, how do you now see the research project in which you participated?
>
> What was your reaction to being filmed while teaching? To the testing? The counseling?

The respondents were led eventually to give specific information required such as the name, location, size, and socio-economic level of their school and of the particular class or classes with which the teacher worked. With the general question, "When you first began teaching, how prepared or unprepared did you feel, and what do you think accounted for it?" the interviewers secured data about the teachers' evaluation of their courses, supervisors, cooperating teachers, principals, and school situations in which they did their student teaching. If the experimental treatments (filming and test interpretation) had not already been commented on by the subjects, the interviewer asked the teachers about their reactions to these treatments.

When appropriate, information from non-teachers paralleled that solicited from teachers. Non-teachers were asked to share their feelings and thoughts about their current activities, when and why they chose their respective positions, and why they did not teach. They were also asked if anybody or anything could have caused them to teach.

Reactions to Telephone Interviewing

Ninety of the subjects were asked how they felt about the telephone interview. Thirty of them had a somewhat neutral reaction -- OK, all right, didn't mind it, no particular reaction. Another 33 had positive feelings -- fine, enjoyed it, fun, very good idea. No one made a negative comment, although 17 said they would have preferred a face-to-face interview. Ten said the convenience of the telephone interview was important to them. Fourteen said the type of interview made no difference to them. Others commented about the expense of talking long-distance, about finding it easier to talk on the phone, about wanting to meet the interviewer. Some said the procedure was novel, interesting, different, or exciting.

The experience of the interviewers failed to confirm a comment by Sellitz, et al. (1961) that telephone interviews must be "brief and superficial to obtain the cooperation of the respondent." The

interviews in this study averaged 35 minutes in duration, but interviewers felt neither pressure nor superficiality in the interview. The interviewers did not believe their subjects felt the conversation was too brief or rushed.

Many reports speak of results of telephone interviews used for survey purposes in which the subjects had no previous contact with the interviewer or the organization he represented. In contrast, even though the interviewers in this study were not known to their subjects, they were identified with a research project that had involved the respondents which the interviewers felt to be a definite advantage.

An Illustrative Analysis*

At the time of this writing, only some of the most important information from the follow-up interviews has been coded. Nevertheless, the information already obtained from coding has made possible assessment of some of the long-term (or relatively long-term) effects of treatments. What follows is one analysis included here to illustrate the kind of information telephone follow-up interviews can yield.

Among the goals of the personalized treatments were (1) to increase the number of promising candidates who continued a career in teaching and (2) to increase the number of unsuitable candidates who left teaching. It was hoped that the experimental treatment would increase the proportion of highest-rated student teachers who remained in the field of education and the proportion of lowest-rated student teachers who quit teaching.

Has the treatment had these effects? The first step in answering this question was to identify a sub-sample of subjects who were going to continue a career in teaching and a sub-sample of subjects who had left the profession. Subjects were classified according to the coding of two items on the follow-up interviews:

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*This analysis was done by Meda White (Fuller, et al., 1969) pages 247-263.

(1) Has the subject taught? (Don't count student teaching.)
YES NO

(2) Does the subject plan to teach at all in the future?
YES NO

The items were coded with acceptable reliability: r = .97, r = .84, respectively. Subjects were classified as continuing teaching if they were coded "yes" to both questions, and were counted as having left the teaching profession if they said they definitely did not plan to teach in the future. (Note that some of these subjects had taught in the past.) All other subjects interviewed were counted as having indeterminate career plans.

At the time of the first follow-up interview, 74 per cent of those majoring in elementary education ("elementaries") were already committed to teaching, vs. only 54 per cent of these majoring in secondary education ("secondaries"). This difference, of course, is statistically significant (chi square = 6.15, df = 1, $p < .02$). But this does not mean that relatively more secondaries had decided not to teach; it means that more were still undecided.

However, among those who had definitely decided (that is, omitting those with indeterminate plans), there was no significant difference between the proportion of elementaries and the proportion of secondaries who elected to teach: about 93 per cent of the elementaries decided to teach, compared to about 82 per cent of the secondaries. This result was surprising, since it is widely believed that a much higher proportion of elementary education majors teach.

Was the treatment successful in increasing the proportion of highest-rated teachers who teach and lowest-rated teachers who quit? To identify highest-rated and lowest-rated subjects, three sets of ratings were used, those of the counseling psychologist, the supervising professor, and the teacher's pupils (during student-teaching). The pupils rated the teachers on a 38-item questionnaire presenting a four-point scale of agreement after each statement, Veldman (1969). As an alternative to ratings by trained adult observers, student

evaluations offer the advantage of being based on a much more comprehensive sample of observed behavior, as well as those to be gained by averaging over the idiosyncratic biases of large numbers of judges.

As Table 1 shows, if teachers with indeterminate plans are dropped from the sample, there is no significant difference between the career commitment of highest vs. lowest rated taechers.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF HIGHEST AND LOWEST RATED TEACHERS WHO ARE TEACHERS VS. NOT TEACHERS ONE YEAR AFTER GRADUATION

Ratings as Student Teacher	Teachers	Not Teachers	Totals
Highest	10	0	10
Lowest	11	2	13
Totals:	21	2	23

Fisher's exact p = ns

But if the subjects with indeterminate plans are put in the same category as those who have decided not to teach, highest-rated teachers do show significantly more commitment to a teaching career (Fisher's exact p = .01), as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF HIGHEST AND LOWEST RATED TEACHERS WHO ARE TEACHING VS. NOT TEACHING OR INDETERMINATE ONE YEAR AFTER GRADUATION

Ratings of Student Teacher	Teachers	Not Teaching or Indeterminate	Totals
Highest	10	0	10
Lowest	11	9	20
Totals:	21	9	30

Fisher's exact p = .01

In summary, these findings suggest that there is a tendency for highest-rated teachers to teach and lowest-rated teachers to quit, even without experimental intervention.

How much more improvement was brought about by the experimental treatment? Teachers who had received the treatment must be compared with those who did not receive treatment to see if they made more appropriate career decisions. It was reasoned that from feedback the student teacher would gain insight (into herself) that would help her decide wisely whether or not teaching was for her. Therefore, the prediction was tested by comparing the proportion of desirable career decisions made by all those who had had feedback vs. those who had no feedback.

As shown in Table 3, 15 of the 22 who received feedback (69 per cent) made desirable career decisions, as compared with only four of the eight (50 per cent) who had no feedback. This difference however, with this small sample, is not statistically significant. It appears there is only a slight tendency for feedback to improve the appropriateness of the decision to teach or not to teach.

TABLE 3

HOW FEEDBACK IS RELATED TO APPROPRIATENESS OF DECISION TO TEACH

DECISION	Number of Elementary Education Graduates Making Each Decision: HAD FEEDBACK	HAD NO FEEDBACK
Desirable Decisions		
Highest-rated teachers teaching	8	2
Lowest-rated teachers undecided	6	1
Lowest-rated teachers quitting	1	1
Total desirable decisions:	15	4
Undesirable Decisions		
Highest-rated teachers undecided	0	0
Highest-rated teachers quitting	0	0
Lowest-rated teachers teaching	7	4
Total undesirable decisions	7	4

Fisher's exact p = ns

In summary, the information coded so far from the telephone interviews reveals that, in their second year after graduation, about 61 per cent of those contacted had taught and planned to continue teaching. Only eight per cent had left the profession; the remaining 31 per cent had indeterminate plans. A significantly higher portion of secondary than elementary education majors had indeterminate career plans (44 per cent vs. 20 per cent). Bown, Fuller and Richek (1967) noted differences in prospective elementary and secondary school teachers. Information elicited on the Bown Self-Report Inventory suggested that the elementary school teacher is a more "feeling" individual in relation to children than those majoring in secondary education. Perhaps the elementary teacher knows sooner whether she wants to teach. However, among those who had definitely decided to teach (that is, omitting those with indeterminate plans) there was no significant difference between elementary and secondary education majors in the proportion teaching (93 per cent vs. 82 per cent).

Among elementary education majors, there seemed to be a general tendency for those rated higher as student teachers to be more committed to a teaching career at the time of the follow-up interview. This tendency of highest rated teachers to teach and lowest rated teachers to quit is slightly increased after feedback, but not significantly so.

Perhaps all these findings will be more clear-cut after the five-year follow-up interviews with the same subjects, when the number with indeterminate plans will, presumably, be lowered. Then we may also have some better, perhaps behavioral, measures of the subjects' teaching skill when they were undergraduates.

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APPENDIX A

RATING SCALE FOR TELEPHONE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS FOR TEACHERS

Instructions: Check the blank appropriate to the interviewee's response. Check only one in each category. If more than one is appropriate, check the most appropriate one and circle the number of the other(s) accompanied by your written explanation thereof. Include all supplementary comments made by interviewee. Be as inclusive as possible! Fill in the blanks where called for. Be certain to differentiate between what interviewee said and your feelings about what she said: yours go into "Interpretations."

1. Present occupation

   ___1. Teaching full-time_____

   ___2. Substitute teaching_____

   ___3. Not teaching_____

   Comments:

2. Current school in which she is teaching - has taught

   1. (Name and location)_____

   2. (Size)_____

   3. (Grade levels in the school)_____

   4. (School's budget)_____

   5. (Her salary)_____

   6. (Psychological services?)_____

   Comments:

3. Current class she's teaching - has taught

   1. (Class size)_____

   2. (Grade)_____

   3. (Pupils' achievement level)_____

   4. (Subjects taught or not taught)_____
      (specify)
   5. (Economic level and occupations of parents)_____

   _____

   Comments:

4. Most helpful person(s) in current school - past school

   ___1. principal

   ___2. other teachers

   ___3. counselor

   ___4. other_____

   Comments:

5. Ideal school

   A. In terms of socioeconomic status of pupils

      ___1. upper

      ___2. middle

      ___3. low

   B. In terms of children's motivational level

      ___1. high

      ___2. average

      ___3. low

   C. In terms of school's setting

      ___1. better physical facilities (audio-visual, library, etc.)

      ___2. special teachers (for music, P.E., art, etc.)

      ___3. harmony of coworkers and/or principal (circle one)

Comments:

6. Feeling prepared to teach following graduation

___1. Felt very prepared

___2. Mixed - yes in some ways, no in others

___3. Not at all prepared

Comments:

7. Attributes 6. (above) to:

___1. University courses

___2. Observation and/or student teaching

___3. Other_____

Comments:

8. Attitude toward cooperating teacher

___1. Positive

___2. Neutral

___3. Negative

Comments:

9. Attitude toward student teaching supervisor

___1. Positive

___2. Neutral

___3. Negative

Comments:

10. Attitude toward principal and school (student teaching)

___1. Positive

___2. Neutral

___3. Negative

___4. No contact with principal

Comments:

11. Attitude toward research program

___1. Positive

___2. Neutral - mixed

___3. Negative

Comments:

12. Reaction to psychological testing

___1. Positive

___2. Neutral

___3. Negative

Comments: (Include her reaction to feedback or omission thereof)

13. Reaction to filming

___1. Positive

___2. Neutral

___3. Negative

Comments: (Include her reaction to feedback or omission thereof)

14. Attitude toward future psychological testing

___1. Positive

___2. Negative

Comments:

15. Attitude toward future filming

___1. Positive

___2. Negative

Comments:

16. Reaction to psychological counseling (if applicable)

___1. Positive

___2. Neutral

___3. Negative

Comments:

17. Opinions on education courses

___1. Methods courses helped

___2. Methods courses did not help

___3. Subject matter courses helped

___4. Subject matter courses did not help

Comments:

18. Attitude toward education courses

___1. Positive

___2. Mixed, neutral

___3. Negative

Comments:

19. Types of personal changes since graduating

___1. Attitudes (in relation to teaching, e.g. professionalism)

___2. Growth (e.g. maturity, responsibility)

___3. Life style (marriage, financial independence)

Comments: (specify the above)

20. Amount of personal changes since graduating

___1. A great deal

___2. Moderate

___3. None

Comments:

21. Found different than expected when beginning to teach

___1. Nothing

___2. Specify: (e.g. personal feelings: uncomfortable, confident; classroom problems: discipline, organization; subject matter: music, art)

Comments:

22. Unique contribution to the profession

___1. Businesslike, professional contributions, especially to other teachers

___2. Stimulating, to parents and/or children

___3. Warm, positive; especially to the children, concerned with their emotional growth as well as (or almost to the exclusion of) their intellectual growth.

___4. Innovations - specify

Comments:

23. Education since graduation

___1. Has taken more college courses

___2. In-service, institute, or other professional courses

___3. None

Comments:

24. Future educational plans

___1. Plans to (or is in the process of) work toward a Master's

___2. In-service courses, summer institutes, and so forth

___3. None

Comments:

25. Future teaching plans

___1. Definite - plans to teach always with exception of having children. Will return to classroom as soon as children are in school.

___2. Will stop permanently sometime in near future.

___3. Will teach at a different level (e.g. switch from elementary to secondary, to junior college, etc.)

Comments:

26. Other comments and suggestions on teacher preparation

27. Interviewer's Interpretations.

APPENDIX B

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What experiences in college made a difference in getting your present job? Just how did you "happen" to get this particular job?

2. Now that you are a regular teacher, in what ways do you feel prepared and unprepared and what college courses are responsible? Explore her estimate of effect of supervisor, school, cooperating teacher, principal, particular class, university courses. Do you have now or have you had a student teacher?

3. Thinking of yourself as you are now and of yourself as you were when you left college, are there basic, important differences? What are they and what was the most important in producing the change? (Major impact since college). What unique personal contribution are you making as a teacher? What do you now consider the characteristics of an ideal school situation and the opposite?

4. In the present situation, whom do you find most helpful? What person do you tell how things really seem to you? What psychological services does the school have?

5. What are your long range plans for the future? What do you hope to be doing five or ten years from now?

6. What do you find very different from what you expected?

7. Are you continuing your formal education? What do you consider your professional needs? Would you be willing to come to the University for further interviews or would you prefer someone come to you? Would you like, and would the school permit, filming your class?

8. Do you have any other comments, suggestions or opinions about your preparation or your present situation to add to what you've just said (We'd like this to be as inclusive or representative as possible).

9. Thank her sincerely and generously.

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR NON-TEACHERS

1. What are you currently doing? (e.g. working, at home, etc.) (full time and part time). How do you FEEL about what you're doing now? How LONG have you been doing it? (account for "all" time since graduation). WHEN did you decide to do it? (Find out what connection this had with her decision not to teach.)

2. WHEN did you first think of going into teaching? Can you give me some ideas on WHY you once thought you'd go into teaching? What was your FIRST KNOWLEDGE of what you would need to do to become a teacher? What was your REACTION to this? Did you find anything DIFFERENT than what you'd expected? (plus her impressions, reactions)

3. WHEN did you begin to CHANGE YOUR MIND about going into teaching? What things LED UP TO THIS? (any specific things make you change?) What EFFECT did (University courses, professors, all student teaching contacts, research program) have on you? How PREPARED AND UNPREPARED for teaching did you feel by graduation time? Do you think that something or someone might have been able to encourage you to teach? (specifics!)

4. What MAJOR IMPACTS have you felt in your life since college? What do you plan to be doing in the FUTURE? (education-wise? - teaching? -) Do you have any other comments, opinions, or SUGGESTIONS on teacher preparation?

5. How do you feel about the research project as a whole? How did you feel about the FILMING and TESTS? FURTHER TESTING?